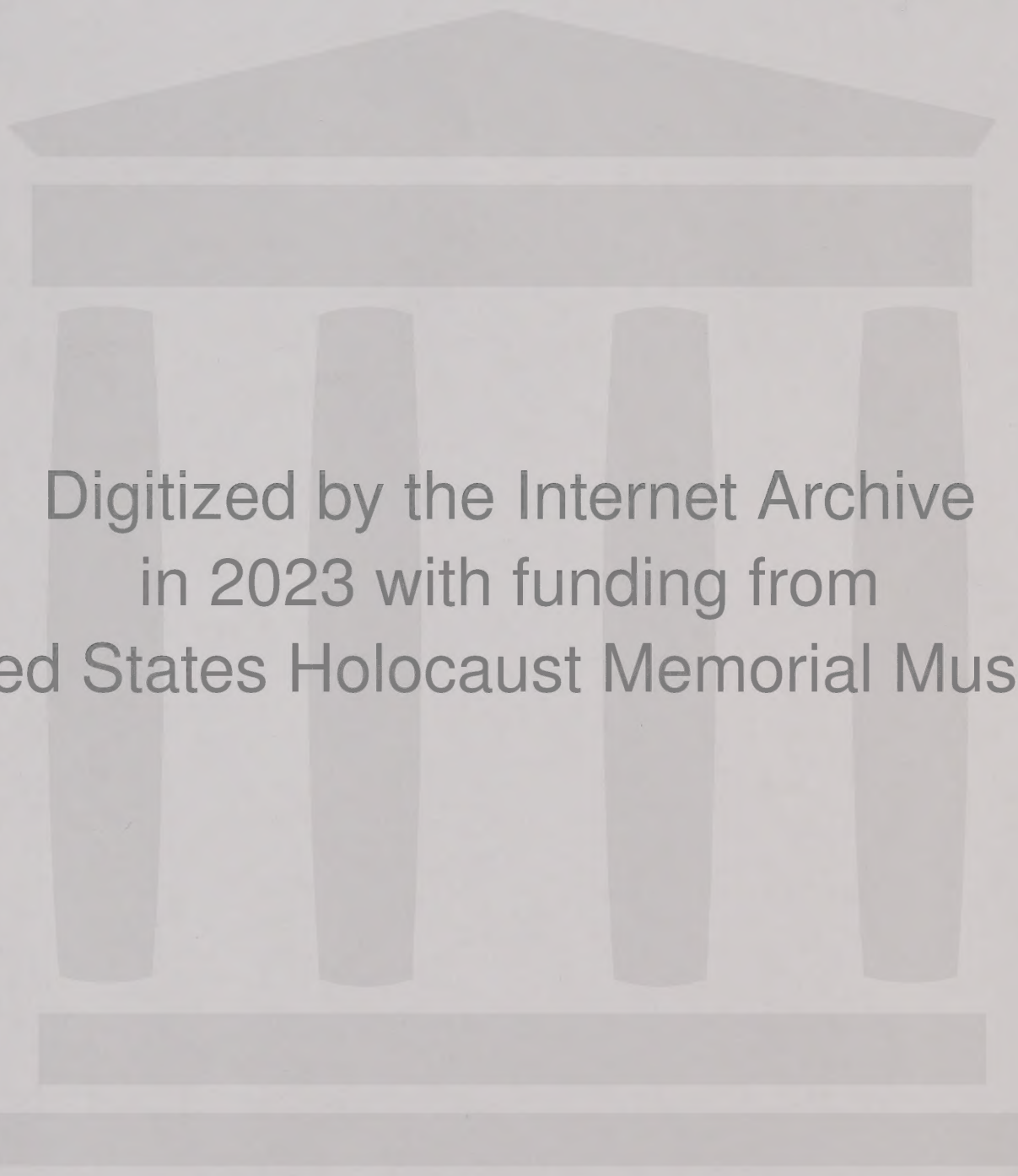




Claims Conference Holocaust Survivor Memoir Collection

Access to the print and/or digital copies of memoirs in this collection is made possible by USHMM on behalf of, and with the support of, the Conference on Jewish Material Claims Against Germany.

The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum respects the copyright and other intellectual property rights associated with the materials in its collection and makes good faith efforts to determine the copyright status of such materials. The Museum has a good faith belief that the materials in this collection may be made publicly available. The Museum welcomes additional information about copyright status. If you have additional information or concerns about the copyright ownership of materials in this collection, please contact the Museum's Library by phone at 202-479-8717 or by email at reference@ushmm.org.



Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2023 with funding from
United States Holocaust Memorial Museum

<https://archive.org/details/bib292096>

THE SEARCH FOR THE TRUE SELF

by

Magda Herzberger

Copyright © 2001, by Magda Herzberger

The Search for the True Self
by
Magda Herzberger

Where are you my true self?

Did you get lost in the maze of destiny?

Did the passing years

Snatch you away from me?

I remember you when you were at my side,

We walked together the city streets

And the country side—

We were always a good team

And now, you appear only in my dream

Why did you leave me behind

Why were you so selfish and unkind?

Wherever you are

No matter how far,

Please come and join me

On my life's terrain,

I want to be with you again—

At one point on my earthly station

I went through a great transformation—

And I noticed your absence—

I miss you presence—

You were always silent and reserved,

Content and undisturbed—

Did you ever miss my company?

You are a part of me—

My spiritual self—

Why do you ignore me

And place me on a shelf?

I hope to find you one day

And then forever

With me you will stay--

It was the night before my birthday. I was tossing around for hours in my bed. I couldn't fall asleep no matter how hard I tried to do so. All kinds of thoughts were passing through my mind. I recalled the different episodes of my life. I evoked the times when I faced very difficult periods of my existence, when I had to cope with very trying and emotionally painful experiences. I also was reflecting on the happy and pleasant times of my living.

Finally, after a long time of all these silent meditations I did fall asleep and I had a very strange dream. In my dream I was looking for my true self. I had the feeling that my true self

was somewhat lost. I was thinking that I was just one day away from my sixty ninth birthday.

The realization that my youth is gone made me sad. I was aware of the fact that I was not young anymore. I felt that somewhere along I lost my real true self. Maybe my true self went through some transformations and I wanted to find out who is the person behind all these transformations.

The years can transform you, not to the point of being a completely different person, but maybe you become an altered person in many ways. Alterations take place through all the life experiences you encounter through the years. All the different stages of your life can maybe kill something in you, but at the same time something new is born instead. Parts of your old self are affected. Some of them are destroyed, and they die. In their place a new self is created. Well, I had these thoughts in my dream as I was walking on a familiar street. It was in fall and it was cool weather. That's when the leaves were turning and I could see some falling leaves blown by the wind. I was walking on that familiar street as though it would be the street where I was living, yet it looked a little bit different than in my waking state. I had seen from a distance someone coming my way, and I recognized the person who was coming. It was my true self. It looked like a teenager. It looked like me a long time ago when I was a young girl. She was approaching me and I felt such happiness. Finally, I was thinking, I found my true self and as she came closer we kind of embraced each other. I said, "Oh my God, my true self, I haven't seen you in such a long time. I'm so happy that you are here. Where were you all this time? I was looking for you."

To my amazement, my true self said to me, “Well, I was always with you. I never was away.”

“Well, how come I didn’t see you and where were you? You couldn’t have been with me all this time.”

My true self said, “Well I was with you, I was a part of you all along. I was inside you all this time.”

“How come I didn’t see you, I didn’t hear you speak?”

“Because you were never listening to your true self. You were acting as though I would be nonexistent.”

“Well I can’t believe you. This couldn’t be true.”

“You want me to prove this?” And then suddenly she disappeared.

“Oh my God, I just barely found my true self, and now it’s gone.” I was calling, “Where are you my true self? Where did you go?”

I heard a voice within me, inside within my body, telling me, “I’m right here. I was always here, but you never were aware ^{of} it. Or maybe you forgot about me.”

Then, suddenly there was a silence and I could see all around me a dense fog forming and I couldn’t see anything. All the people in the street, and everything else, disappeared. I was so confused. I didn’t know what to do or where to go. I couldn’t see anything, I couldn’t follow any direction. I cried out, “True self what’s happening to me? What is this? Where am I? I’m scared. I’m surrounded by vapors.”

My true self said, "Well, you know what it is? These are formed by the tears you shed.

You are shedding too many tears."

I asked, "What should I do?"

Suddenly, all the vapors disappeared and I heard my true self talking to me. "Get away from here! You have to get away in order to find your true self."

I said to my true self, "You are in me."

Then she said, "Yes, but you have to get away. You have to get away from here. Run, run!"

"Why do I have to do that?"

"Because you have to really get acquainted with your true self. Your true self is like an alien to you. I want you to understand your true self. I want you to understand who you really are. And for that, you have to leave this place."

I started running and running desperately. I was thinking that it is good that I can run so fast because I used to run marathons and now I can run long distances and get away fast from this place.

I was running and running. I left behind the city and I could see a fall landscape. The trees and bushes had their fall colors. There was also a cool wind. I was scared. I had to keep on running.

Then I came to a road, which looked like a country road with no end, I couldn't see any buildings anymore. I was wondering where I was heading to. I had no direction. I asked my

true self, “True self speak up, you were complaining that I never listen to you, but I want to listen to you now, tell me “where am I?”

My true self was silent. So I kept on running and I came to a bifurcation. In my desperation I asked myself, “Now there are two roads here diverging, which should I take, the left or the right one?” Then I addressed my true self, “True self speak up now.” My true self was silent. I told myself, “Well, I’m going to pick one of the roads. I’m picking the one on the left” and I picked the road on the left. I was running, running, and running on it desperately and it led me to nowhere. After awhile I was thinking, “No, I have to turn back and take the road on the right.” So I ran all the way back to this bifurcation and I followed the road on the right.

I was running and running on it and I couldn’t see anything in sight. I was getting more and more tired. The wind started blowing and I could see dried leaves on the ground. I could also see the rusty colored grass. Then, the trees disappeared and there were no more trees on my road except the rusty colored grass. It was like a desert with grass and nothing on it and the grass was covered with dried leaves. I was wondering, “Where are the trees? How come these leaves are here? I don’t even see trees. Where did they come from?”

Suddenly, I could see in the distance a synagogue. It looked like a synagogue. As I came closer and closer, I noticed the Star of David on it. It was clear to me that this was a Jewish synagogue. To my surprise, the door was opened and I entered it. When I came in, it seemed to me that there were people in the synagogue and I had in my mind that I actually had to come here because I had to present a speech and read some of my poetry. I went up on the pulpit

and I began my speech and I started reading my poetry. I was carried away with all that and I went on and on. Suddenly, after quite awhile my eyes fell on the empty benches. There was nobody in the temple. I was surprised and I couldn't quite understand what was happening. Why did I come here? Am I all right doing these things? I looked around and I really got confused and very bewildered. I remembered that before I started talking, the sun was rising. I could see the door of the temple opening, and I could see the sun descending from the sky and entering into the temple.

I was even more surprised when the sun was sitting down on one of the benches. It was sitting down in the first row and started applauding. I was thinking "Am I going insane seeing things? Am I hallucinating?"

The sun exclaimed, "Bravo, bravo!"

I said to the sun, "Tell me please, am I all right? Am I dreaming? There is nobody here in this temple except you. I never have seen the sun coming down from the sky. I never have heard of the sun talking. What's happening to me?"

The sun was answering me to my great surprise. "Well, can you see anybody here?"

I said, "No, I can't see anyone."

"Well, is that possible that there is someone here whom you can't see?"

"In my imagination it could only be a spirit. Who else but a ghost?"

"Did you ever think of God?"

"I didn't think of that. It's true. The spirit of God must be here. This is the house of

God, the temple.”

The sun asked me again, “But is there yet someone whom you can see? Look closely.”

I could see on the opposite side where the sun was sitting in the same row, the first row, that there was an angel sitting also. I asked myself, “Am I going insane?” I got really scared. I couldn’t help it. I got panicky.. I tried to talk to the angel. I addressed the angel. “Angel, what is happening to me? Am I going insane? Am I hallucinating? Am I seeing things which don’t exist?”

The angel said, “No you are all right.”

“How come if I’m all right I see such impossible things?”

“No, these things are not impossible, because you are living in two worlds. The outside world and the spiritual world. And both of these worlds are real. The two worlds are the worlds of reality and the worlds of imagination. You can create different worlds in your imagination. But these are the creations of your mind. So you have created all these fantasies which look very real to you. Don’t you have a world of imagination when you are asleep and you have dreams? That’s your dream world and dreams seem so real. In your dreams you can’t even discern between fantasy and reality.”

The angel continued asking me questions. “Just look closely. Do you see someone here? Someone sitting right here in the temple, waiting to be observed?”

As I was looking, to my great amazement, between the angel and the sun I have seen my father sitting. He died long ago in the extermination camps of Dachau during the Holocaust. I

realized that his spirit was there. But although it must have been only his spirit, he looked so real. He looked like long ago when I was a teenager. He died way back in 1944. So many years have passed by since then, but he looked still the same, as young as when he was separated from me in the concentration camps of Auschwitz during W.W.II, when we were taken there as prisoners being of Jewish faith. I looked at my father and I said, "Oh, how come that you are here? I didn't see you for so long."

My father answered, "I came because I knew that you needed me."

"I'm so glad that you came, indeed I needed you. I had so many difficulties I had to go through. But I remember a time, a time long time ago when in my dreams I was looking for you. At that time also I had some difficulties I had to overcome, some problems to solve and I tried to find solutions for them. Do you remember? You have seen me in my dreams; you must have seen me too at that time. We met in our dreams. I want to refresh your memory.

It was a long time ago, but I never forgot my dream. I was dreaming that I was looking for you and I knew that you are in a building. I've seen that building which had several stories. I entered it. As I entered it, I realized how many floors and doors it had. I knew that you must be in one of the rooms in that building. I looked for all the doors and it was very strange, because all the doors were locked. I checked all of them. I ran up on the third floor and there I checked all the doors but they were all locked except for one. I put my hand on the doorknob and I pushed it. It opened up. It was strange because it was a room which had nothing in it, no furniture, except in the middle of the room there was a big box. But I knew that it wasn't just a

box - it was a coffin-and I knew that you must be in that coffin. I felt you were there. I tried to bang with my fists on the lid of the coffin, trying to tell you, "Please my father I need you. Listen to me. Open up! Open up! Open up!." But I realized that you can't open the coffin. I felt that I must see you and talk to you. At the same time I felt that it would be a sacrilege to open your final resting place. I wanted to see you and I wanted to talk to you. I tried to open forcefully the lid of the coffin. I was pushing and pushing on it, and at one point I was able to push up the lid of the coffin. There you were lying on your back motionless. Your eyes were closed. I talked to you. "Father! Father! Please wake up! I want to talk to you! I didn't see you for so long and I have so many things to tell you." But there was silence; you didn't answer. I said, "Father! Father! Don't you want to listen to all the things I went through? I know you love me. Please, I need your help. Listen to me." I tried to tell you all the things which happened to me through the years and all the difficulties I encountered. Then, slowly, as I was talking I had the feeling that you were listening, although your eyes were closed. At one point, you opened your eyes and you looked at me. I was pleading with you, "Father! Father! I need your help!" You looked at me and said, "My dear child, I can't help you now. You have to help yourself." Those words, that sentence, was ringing in my ears. And it's still ringing in my ears after so many years, after such a long time. I understood then and I understand now that you have to help yourself because nobody can solve your own problems. It was a message which you gave me. But now I am here. I need you. And please help me to solve my problems.

You looked at me and to my great surprise you said the same thing, "I came to tell you

that you have to help yourself, that you have to have faith in God. This is the message I can give you now. You are really never alone. You know that Almighty is watching over you at all times and I pray to God in heaven that He should help you. This is the help I can give you. I am now in heaven and you should know that I care for you. I always listen to you and I ask God for help and assistance. Remember that, remember that, and because of that, you never have to be afraid. Didn't God help you? Didn't God help you in the German concentration camps? You survived. He gave you a second chance. He watched over you. He watched over you through all the years. He helped you. He gave you the talent to write music and poetry. My message is: develop your talents fully and have faith and courage. Life is beautiful. You should know my spirit is always with you. You are my child, my love. I watch over you beyond the grave. And now, I must go."

I said, "Father! Father! Please don't leave me! I don't know what to do. What should I do now?"

My father said, "I have to leave you now. And you go back, go back from where you came from. You go back, go back. Leave now, leave now. And here is the angel who is going to lead you to the right path. Follow the angel. Follow the angel." My father disappeared.

As soon as my father disappeared, the angel was at my side. He stepped up on the podium where I was and said to me, "Give me your hand. I will lead you. Just follow me."

I took the hand of the angel. Together we walked out of the synagogue. And then I wanted to hold on to the angel. I wanted to keep the angel's hand. But the angel, to my great surprise, said to me, "I go in front and you follow me."

“Angel, I feel so weak, I want to hold on to you.”

“You have to be able to hold on to yourself. Just run and follow this path in front of you.

Follow this path in front of you.” The angel disappeared.

I was again there in front of the synagogue and I could see the same path which I trotted before. I was wondering. “I don’t want to go back to the same path. I don’t want to go back to the same place because I will never find my true self. How can I find my true self?”

Suddenly I heard a voice within me, “I am your true self. I am here.”

“True self, what should I do? Please guide me.”

“Run, run, run. Just follow the path. Just follow the path.”

“My true self, I am scared. How am I going to find my way.”

“You will. God is watching over you. Listen to your true self. Remember, you always had faith in God when you were very small and a young child. You were never afraid. You always did the things you wanted to do and you knew by then that God was always with you. Return to your true self. You will find your true self. Your true self is always with you when you believe in God’s assistance. Your true self is the one who has faith in God. Your true self is strong. If you want to find your true self then you must believe in yourself. You have to follow your own direction.”

Then, my true self was silent and I knew that I was on my own again.

I was running, running, again desperately. I was telling myself, “This time I am not going to veer off to the right or to the left. I will just run straight ahead.”

The landscape repeated itself. I could see again the fall landscape, the fallen leaves on the ground and nothing else. It looked like a desert of rusty grass and fallen leaves. Then from the distance I could see tall trees appearing again. I kept on running, running, and running. I must have run a long distance. I got so tired. Finally, it was already evening and I could see the lights of the city. I knew this was the city from where I started from. But a strange thing happened as I was approaching the city. Although it seemed that it was getting later and later at night during my run, as I was approaching the city, more light appeared - actually a very bright light. As I came closer, I could see the sunrise. When I arrived to the city I was sure that it was the place from where I started my run and I felt utterly confused. I could see the people and the familiar streets coming into my view.

Then, as I entered the city more, its streets suddenly disappeared. It was like a repetition of my previous experience. A dense fog surrounded me again and I couldn't see anything. I felt that the same thing is repeating itself over and over. It seemed that after all that happened to me I got nowhere. I was desperate, and I cried out. "My true self! Where am I? What's happening now to me again?" I see again the vapors.

But my true self was silent. Strangely, I could hear the voice of the angel. "Don't be afraid. Don't be afraid. God is with you."

"Oh angel, I can't see you. I know you are a sacred spirit sent from the sky. Tell me what's happening to me. I am in the deep fog and I can't see anything. What is that?"

And the angel said, "These are all the tears that you've shed." "Look. Can you see

anything in this fog that you didn't see before?"

"Oh Angel, I can't see anything."

"The fog is going to clear. God clears the fog. And you will see. You will see. You've shed enough tears. Stop your tears and look around and you will see that the fog will gradually dissipate." I heard the angel's voice, "Now look. What do you see?"

I could see my family surrounding me. My husband, my children and my mother. I said, "Oh my God! This is my family. It is my family."

I could hear the angel's voice, "You find your true self in your family. Your family is a part of your true self. That's your true self. Your true self is not only you, it is also your family."

"Oh my God," I said, "I see my mother here and I know that she died a year ago."

Again I heard the voice of the angel. "Yes, but her spirit is always with you. She is residing in heaven. She just wants to remind you that her love never died. She is always with you just like your father and she's now in heaven, but she wanted to see you and talk to you."

I could hear my mother's voice. "My child, my child. Live in peace with yourself. Find joy in your family. This is your family which makes you happy. You are part of me and they are a part of you. I go back to heaven, but remember, remember your true self. I know best what your true self is, because I gave you birth. If you want to find your true self, then feel the love and affection coming from your family. Keep your memories of me, of your father, and of your family members who are residing in heaven. As long as you keep your love and faith in your

heart, you will always be your true self. Your true self never left you and can never leave you.”

My mother disappeared. I was embracing my family. We hugged each other. I asked myself, “What do I really want from life, why did I go so far looking for my true self? Why did I do that? Am I such an egotist that I only think of myself? I can look for my true self and never find it because my true self was all along with me, and maybe I have to go through all this in order to understand that my true self is now not only me but my true self became a part of my family and they became a part of me.”

So we embraced each other and I felt such happiness, peace and harmony descend upon me. Then, I heard a voice, “Its eight o’clock in the morning. Wake up my darling.” I was wondering where this voice was coming from. So I opened my eyes and I was lying next to my husband in bed. He said, “You must have had a nice dream and a deep sleep. I tried to wake you up.”

I looked at him and I embraced him. I said, “I love you, I love you, I love you- you are a part of my true self.”

